

FROM THE COUP TO THE 2013 ELECTIONS: IMAGINARIES OF CHANGE AND HONDURAN RESISTANCE PATHS

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Resumo

Este artigo descreve e analisa a história da Constituição e a mobilização de novos atores sociais em Honduras desde o golpe de estado de 2009. A referência é de atores que têm surgido com uma agenda de reivindicatoria de inclusão, com base em imaginários sociais que se opõem os imaginários do Status quo. Tudo isso no contexto de um país com um sério atraso social, imerso em uma polarização política e altas taxas de violência social

Palavras-chave

 $Partidos \ politicos. \ Movimentos \ sociais. \ Imaginários \ sociais. \ Projetos \ emancipatórios. \ Crisehon durenha.$

Abstract

This article describes and analyses the constitution and mobilization trajectory of new social actors in Honduras since the coup of 2009. The reference is about actors that have emerged with an vindicatory agenda of inclusion, based on social imaginaries that are opposed to the imaginary of the establishment. All this within the framework of a country with deep social lags, immersed in a political polarization and high rates of social violence.

Keywords

Political Parties. Social Movements. Social Imaginaries. Emancipatory projects. Honduran crisis.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a valuable effort to reflect about social struggles in Central American countries, located in an area of strategic importance to the U.S.A., sometimes called the U.S.A. *backyard*. It is added that Honduras has been one of the Latin American countries traditionally characterized by the absence of a national

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bourgeoisie capable of integrating social relations; so it was the foreign capital which previously molded the structure of the State (Arancibia1991).

On the other hand, it is necessary to acknoledge that Honduran resistance fights take place in a moment that two trends are intercepting each other:: the deepening of the strategy of accumulation by dispossession in territories which tend to denationalization (Harvey, 2003), and the expansion of anti-neoliberal regimes of neo- developmental orientation in the South of the continent (Stolowicz, 2009).

Since 2009 coup d'état, social tensions have become more complex than in any other time in the Honduran history. Indeed, now there is a lethal cocktail characterized by at least five critical factors (Calix, 2014): a) high level of citizen insecurity and impunity (the worldwide highest homicide rate, with vast territories controlled by drug cartels and organized crime groups, b) notable levels of poverty and inequity (7 of every 10 Honduran are poor, and it is one of the five most inequitable countries in Latin America, c) fiscal insolvency (the highest fiscal deficit of Central America in 2013, and a growing trend towards public borrowing, d) environmental vulnerability, compounded by climatic shocks of the last few decades and, e) political polarization after the coup, that has meant a relative loss of the dominant hegemony.

The neo-liberal orientation promoted in Honduras since the 90s of the 20th century led to a series of measures of people dispossession and reduction of the State roles in economic and social policies. Pressured by circumstances, unions and social movements had to fight against the displacement effects of the imposed model, and although they could not reverse the majority of decisions taken by the governments, at least they internalized the need to coordinate the efforts of resistance against the neo-liberal offensive.

On the other hand, also from the 1990s there also were highlighting movements and organizations that raised to the political system non-traditional demands, which include gender equity, the fulfilment of human rights -in particular those of the childhood and the adolescence-, environmental responsibility and the vindication of the rights of indigenous and black peoples. Even tough, the new struggles did not let appear fragmented, while traditional demands - linked to labour arena - lost their importance in the political debate.

In this context, the modest but symbolically expressive Manuel Zelayas's Government spins between 2006 and 2009, came to create a situation that opened spaces for participation and articulation to certain social movements, especially in support of measures of energy sovereignty, the entrance to the Petrocaribe and ALBA structures, the leveling of the minimum wage to the cost of living and, not least, the iniciative of a non-binding public consultation to promote a National Constituent Assembly.

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Manuel Zelaya chaired the Government between 2006 and 2009, in that period he still belonged to the Liberal Party. This party along with the National Party make up the historic bipartisanship that dates from the beginning of the 20th century. The coup came to split the Liberal Party, and an important part of its militants and leaders joined the dissident forces that later, in 2012, would created the Freedom and Refoundation Party (LIBRE).

So the overthrow of Manuel Zelaya does not happen in a vacuum, rather triggers an underground construction process of subaltern identities. That is why the spontaneous protest could rapidly became an organizational space that integrated multiple dissatisfactions of the Honduran population with the political system, economic orientation, and the dominant cultural matrix. So resistance forces gather in the first instance, not only the social movements who built some kind of relations with Zelaya's Government, but also gather other actors who had criticized the formed Zelaya's decisions.

2. THE IMAGINARIES IN DISPUTE

The 21st century second decade has shown, with great intensity, the antagonism between social imaginaries of the subaltern sectors and the imaginary of those who have exercised political and economic power in Honduras. The visualization in the social arena of an emancipatory projects wide are poses the challenge of articulation in the diversity of the social actors who question both the current correlation of forces as the public policy orientation.

The Honduran oligarchic status quo imagery can be synthesized in at least five fundamental assumptions: a) the idea of order as denial of conflicts, with a repressive security conception, b) acceptance of inequality and concentration of wealth as a requirement to facilitate room for manoeuvre of the "big entrepreneurs" capable of creating wealth and employment, c) the subordination of nature as a passive subsystem within the economic system, d) conceiving democracy as a system limited to electoral issuess and the dispute for power between elites under certain rules, with high barriers to entry for new players, and . e) patriarchy as a regulatory factor of gender relations in all spheres of society.

Meanwhile, at the core of the underground imaginaries it is posible to notice an interpellation to the narrow democratic matrix - shackled to the electoral aspects – and instead of that reduction, there is a proposal to expand the democratic horizon and praxis, as an inclusive political system, mostly as a style of life capable of shaping social relations in the micro, meso and macro

For the purposes of this article, the notion of social imaginary is understood in the sense which Castoriadis (1983) refers to their instituting dimension, as those representations that question the established order.

social levels. To achieve this democracy-building project, it is crucial the plural inclusion of social sectors within a process of constitutional framework redefinition.

Of course, specify the convergences and define the differences in the positions of the subalterns actors is not an easy task. Several sectors believe that the objectives and instruments of change should be limited to the political current room for manoeuvre, while other actors, especially linked to territorial movements are demanding a deeper change, to allow a refoundational time for Honduran society.

Highlights the fact that there are visible overlap between the actors who are part of the resistance forces, in particular with regard to the transformation of gender relations and on the concepts of democratic rule. In regards to the first theme, the basic idea poses to equate gender opportunities, since the possession of economic assets, access to educational and employment opportunities, rights to personal integrity and stop the violence suffered by women in different spheres. On the second issue, there is a tacit agreement to appeal to a conception of democracy which better combine the dimensions of representation and participation, for which becomes priority to deepen the participatory dimension, because this has been reduced to the practice of voting and communal mechanisms with little connection to the crucial decisions that mark the course of public policy.

About differences in point of view, the main disageements are identified in economic system scope to organize and distribute the production and wealth. A group of actors, linked to the middle classes and certain professional guilds, criticize neoliberalism but without questioning the structural capitalist relations. Indeed, they are inclined to state recovery of certain functions of economic regulation, shielding the essential public services, as well as a greater capacity for tax collection based on direct taxes. Other groups, conceive and are demanding a radical transformation of the relations of production to dismiss the capitalist accumulation logic, to make way for a generation of socially distributed surplus, exceeding the vision of individual profit. There are also another postures that promote alternative forms of economy in the micros social spaces, linked to the logic of fair trade, self production and anticonsumerism.

Honduras as a mostly *mestizo* country (Euraque, 1996) - approximately 90% of the population-, it has been difficult to properly weigh demands from indigenous groups and afro descendants, even though they are those most impacted by the relations of domination, in particular by accumulation by dispossession strategies linked to the mining extractions, the extensive plantations such as palm, the hydroelectric projects and, recently, by the granting of

sovereignty which will imply the already-approved development special regions regime, commonly known as charter cities².

In the midst of adverse conditions and open discrimination and help-lessness, imaginaries of indigenous groups and afro-descendants claim the respect of ancestral forms of coexistence with the land and the ecosystem in general, as well as an enlargement of the structure of opportunities to overcome their shortcomings in terms of income, health, education and political representation³.

3. ARTICULATION IN DIVERSITY

The coordination and mobilization of various excluded groups has therefore presented real problems that have impacted the cohesion required to confront the status quo. Even so, it is possible to identify a first great achievement of the social struggle undertaken in 2009 to date; despite the differences of vindictive horizon, in addition to repression and media disqualification, it was not given a rout of the social energy unleashed after the coup. Of course, there were different intensities of the protest cycles, some divisions were given, but the bulk of the social force remained articulated in the National Front against the Coup d'etat, which later became the Popular Resistance National Front (FNRP, for its spanish acronym).

One of the first collective decisions taken by sectors in resistance was the one of not endorsing elections in November 2009. The position was blunt: if the pro-coup sector did not reverse, they would not participate in the electoral process. Because the coup was no reversed, the vast majority of people did not participate in the elections. That is why the turnout was only 49%, the lowest since the return to constitutional order in 1980.

The external mediation initiatives to reverse the coup were ineffective, but at least they allowed the safe-conduct granted to ousted President so he could go out of the Embassy of Brazil (in Honduras) towards the Dominican Republic. While Zelaya was in exile, between January and may 2011, the FNRP followed discarding the electoral way, opting instead to promote the call for the National Constituent Assembly. Meanwhile, the results of elections in 2009

The model cities are based on the concept of the "charter cities" postulated by Paul Romer, an American economist and Professor of the University of New York, which advocates the establishment of special development zones similar to Singapore and Hong Kong, which have flexible legislative and economic provisions that allow them to become key sources of trade. In Honduras, the proposal of establishing a model city implies to create an independent territory with autonomous administration of the Honduran Government, that would have its own laws, judiciary and tax collection system.

³ In essence, claiming imaginaries of indigenous and black peoples are the ones closer to the "Buen Vivir" paradigm that has emerged in the social change processes in Bolivia and Ecuador..

allowed an almost absolute power concentration in favour of the National Party, in collusion with the soon diminished Caucus of the Liberal Party. Such a concentration of power made possible quickly approval of economic measures which put emphasis on indirect taxes, as also decrees that promoted the sale of Honduran territory and its natural resources through blatant concessions. Vis à vis these measures, the reppresion state arm was expanded due to increase of military presence in internal security duties.

The effervescence of social mobilization seen between June 2009 and January 2010 was decreasing from there onwards, somewhat predictable according to social protest intensitty cycles. In any case, the Government still worsened the confrontation with one of the country's strongest unions- the teachers-, and through intimidation and repression was able to weaken them over the period 2010-2013. Also the government raised the spoils and repressive strategies against social movements of territorial base (who were opposed to hydroelectric projects, mining concessions, or that demanded land claim).

There is a kind of paradox here: the unprecedented joint forces around the FNRP was barely useful to stop the machinery of people dispossession and concentration of oligarchic power. There should be several reasons behind this phenomenon, however, the weight of two factors should be seen as a hint toward a plausible explanation: the progressive FNRP electoral tilt and, not less significant, the notable oligarchic regrouping to confront and to weaken the resistance forces⁴.

On the orientation of the FNRP, then comes one of its first internal conflicts. The sectors mostly linked to territorial grassroots movements were demanding greater solidarity in favour of sectors mostly hit by the regime. This conflict was not processed optimally and resulted in disqualifications and mutual resentment that, without destroying the FNRP, ended up limiting their vindictive horizon.

In the second quarter of 2011 a mediation initiative tooks place at the request of the Presidents of Venezuela and Colombia, to facilitate that Honduras could reach internal agreements that put an end to the repression and political persecution. This initiative gives rise to the Cartagena Agreement, which without going into the depth of the social conflict, paves the way for the safe return of former President Zelaya and several former officials of his

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The alignment of the status quo occurs even in a moment in which the dominant faction of the national party is assumed as an aggressive emerging economic group, which through business with State and new sources of foreign investment attraction has planted a challenge to the oligarchic group that has monopolized economic power in the last 20 years. The existence of LI-BRE and the FNRP has induced a kind of relative truce or low intensity war between economic factions.

Government, as well as the guarantees to allow the FNRP become a political actor tolerated by the *status quo*.

The Zelaya´s country return, in may 2012, provoked a relevant change in the FNRP route. Zelaya and his closest followers persuaded the FNRP to accept electoral option as the most suitable in that moment, and therefore it became urgent to create a political party to get in into the elections of November 2013. that decisión caused a new dissent inside the FNRP among those who did not want to endorse the national electoral process, due to the lack of trnasparency in the rules of the game. Even with this fracture, the FNRP continued keeping inside the majority of followers and sectors that opposed the coup, in an amalgam that consisted mainly of dissidents of the Liberal Party, trade unions and social movements, except as it is inferred, those of territorial base who felt that the FNRP had sidestepped the support to their struggles.

4. THE ELECTORAL ARM BUILDING

In March 2012, it is legally created the Freedom and Reofundation Party (LIBRE, by ists spanish acronym). Thereafter the FNRP is completely subordinated on the electoral strategy. The novel party began with scarce economic resources that are offset with an impressive volunteer base. This volunteer base will make it also possible to constitute the political cadres and the communal collectives to carry on the electoral campaign. In November of 2012, LIBRE wants to demonstrate its social support, that is why the party authorities announced to celebrate primary party elections, as ordinarily do the National and the Liberal Parties. There were created five internal movements, and all of them agreed to present a unique presidential candidatue: Xiomara Castro (Manuel Zelaya's wife). Therefore, the LIBRE primary party elections focused on the National Congress and municipal corporations candidatures. Nearly two-thirds of the candidacies were won by Liberal Party dissidents movements.

In Honduras, according to the law, the primary elections are supervised by the Electoral Supreme Tribunal (TSE). According to the questionable results of TSE, LIBRE reached five hundred ninety four thousand votes, against the seven hundred nineteen thousand who reached the Liberal Party and the million hundred forty thousand of votes allocated to the national party. However, it is *vox populi* in the country that the two traditional parties have historically inflated the results of their primaries to auto enhance its image of massive support political forces.

But LIBRE is not the only party that arises after the crisis of 2009. Indeed, the number of parties went from five to nine, which means that four new partiess were created to participate in the elections of 2013. In addition to LIBRE, there was born the Anti-Corruption Party (PAC, led by an old and famous

sports TV presenter; the FAPER, coordinated by an experienced human rights defender -FNRP dissident-, and the Patriotic Alliance, created by the head of the armed forces at the time of the 2009 Coup. Of those four new parties, it was clear that LIBRE had the biggest drag, followed by the PAC, while the other two showed a negligible electoral support.

While the mainstream corporate media stigmatized or close spaces to LIBRE - at the same time that they casted the two traditional parties-, Most of the polls during 2013 indicated that Xiomara Castro would win November elections. It is true that LIBRE did not has the structures and resources of the National and the Liberal parties, but those shortages were compensated by two significant strengths: the symbolic unifying effect that resistance to the coup represented, and the remarkable volunteer mobilization who created and held the territorial collectives around the country.

The tolerance of the regime towards the FNRP-LIBRE showed to be ambiguous, since in a camouflaged manner the Cartagena Agreement was breached. Indeed, reports carried out by national and international human rights organizations indicated that political repression continued, not only against the FNRP-LIBRE but also against social activists opposed to mining, hydroelectric projects and expansion of monoculture plantations like oil palm.

5. THE ELECTORAL BET: WITHOUT STRATEGIES AGAINST THE REPRESSION AND THE PROBABLE FRAUD

The electoral euphoria, as promise of institutional change from 2014, sidestepped the opposition role to criticize the situation of violence, corruption, plunder and authoritarianism that characterized the current government. In addition, the favorable polls and the LIBRE massive political rallies in all regions of the country, somehow injected an exaggerated optimism that lower the guard about the likely electoral fraud. Most critical sectors linked to the FNRP, as well as social movements articulated in Refoundational Convergence Unit (not integrated into LIBRE) alerted on the danger if the new party do not built a strategy to reverse the fraud. Curiously, the party that was most consistent to claim the manipulation of the electoral census and the weaknesses of the system of transmission was the Anti-Corruption party (PAC), while LIBRE authorities did not seem to be worried about those risks.

Even with the presence of dozens of international observers, one week before the elections there was a increase of intimidatory actions towards people related to the FNRP-LIBRE, perpetrated by the repressive forces of the State, including the newly created military police. At the same time, the ruling party machinery multiplied clientele political actions across the country, delivering food, cement, discount cards or cash to buy voters undecided and pressed by the economic narrowness.

Certainly, that was the most internationally observed election in Honduran political history. But one thing is the first act - the polling among seven in the morning to five in the afternoon - and another is the vot counting and subsequent transmission of data. During the first act, polling passed with relatively normally, with some episodes of violence against representatives of LI-BRE and electoral custodians. In the second act, in the darkness of the night, is when it is forged the other part of the fraud that completes the manipulation of the census, the transfer of electoral credentials and vote-buying. It appears in scene the transmission and fingering, area in which even the complacent reports of the OAS and the European Union recognized weaknesses in the Security Protocol.

Entering shamelessly electoral records favoring the National Party, close to nine o'clock in the evening the TSE declared partially first official results giving an advantage of approximately five points to the pro-government candidate. That advantage, in the next two days was stretched to eight percentage points. Meanwhile LIBRE and PAC were showing evidence, despite the media siege and the silence of the justice system, of multiple irregularities in traffic of credentials, falsification of records and substantial digital data "failures".

The little reliable final results reported a turnout of 61%, much higher than the ones reported in the election of 2005 and 2009, but this is a relatively low considering the expectations placed in the process by the citizenry in resistance and by the own political elites. But even so, after the elections, at the presidential-level LIBRE is positioned with the national party as the first two political forces of the country, followed by the Liberal Party and the PAC, while the rest of parties, as a whole, did not even get 1% of the valid votes. At the legislative level -128 seats-, LIBRE reached 37, the national party got 48, Liberal Party 26, PAC 13, PINU 1, PDCH 1 and UD 1. At the local level -298 municipalities-, LIBRE obtained a modest share of 31 mayors. In the balance, according TSE data, LIBRE had 28.79% of valid votes at the presidential level, the 28.9% at the National Congress, and 10.4% of the local governments (Otero, 2014).

For the period 2014-2018 government will continue in power of the National Party, a peculiar event, because taking advantage of the fragmentation of the partisan spectrum, this party for the first time reaches to win two consecutive Governments since the return to constitutional order in 1980. Notwithstanding this fact the National Congress shows a new correlation of forces, since four parties have a significant number of seats. Should be noted that none party achieved 65 seats required for a simple majority (the national party had won 71 deputies in the elections of 2009), much less to reach the qualified majority of two thirds (85 seats). LIBRE become the biggest opposition caucus; however, it could be able to promote a progressive agenda just if

the party gets to build alliances with the other opposition parties, something that although is not impossible either is taken for granted, considering the ideological alignments of Honduran political parties.

At the beginning of 2014 a new parties architecture is seen in the political system. It is not the death of the Liberal bipartisanship, but it is a strong huge tremor that, according to the actors behaviour and the environment conditions trends, it could be ratified in upcoming elections.

After knowing the National Congress deputies composition, the outgoing Legislature hastily passed dozens of decrees, in particular tax increases and private concessions, as well as high level appointments in auditing institutions as the Attorney General of the Republic and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, thus usurping powers which, according to the law, corresponded to the new legislature. This foreshadows a great power concentration in the Executive Branch, as a National Party strategy to compensate for not having enough seats in the National Congress. In any case, it should be noted that the national party could continue having a strategic ally in the Liberal Caucus to get the majority required to approve most of the legislative branch decisions.

6. CHALLENGES IN THE SHORT AND MEDIUM TERM

It is crucial that the heterogeneous resistance forces consider the current time as a time to rethink the action both in the parliamentary field and in the social movements arena. Inside LIBRE this should be a self-criticism moment, to deduce lessons, correct mistakes, and, consolidate successes. Critical reflection should recognize, first of all, the remarkable electoral support the party achieved in his first participation, despite being a party created just sixteen months before national elections. But the leadership should also assume that the symbolic effect of the coup will weigh less as crucial factor to obtain citizenship support in upcoming elections. Hence, the party will have to develop political muscle, which means improving management capacity and expanding its solidarity action in favour of traditionally excluded groups.

During the next four years, LIBRE will have to strengthen the technical, political and ethical performance of their parliamentary caucus and its representation in local governments. At the same time, LIBRE shuould be neutralizing traditional vices that threaten the young political party. Indeed, the party must avoid impositions of the highiest party authorities, make way for internal democratization, as well as break through the barriers that limit youth and women participation.

But, first, the party has to rethink its relationship with the social movements, giving up the idea of subordinate them or antagonizing with those

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who manifest discrepancies. In general, for the sectors that make up social resistance in Honduras, a priority challenge is the articulation of the diversity of popular subjects (Calix, 2010 (b)).

In this sense, it is convenient to consider that party rhythms and social movements rhythms tend to be different, but there is necessary moments of convergence and intensification of cooperation relations to take advantage of political junctures. In that way, creation of a climate of trust is vital to build horizontal relations.

LIBRE should not consider itself as the only centre of gravity of this historical movement of raising awareness, decolonization –in Quijano's terms (2000)- and political action against hegemonic power But of course that this party is an important actor who should be able to integrate into a shared agenda to change the political forces correlation. The critical situation in the country requires urgently take the double challenge of, in the short term, neutralize the regressive steps of the regime and, in the medium and long term, strengthen an emancipatory political project.

The biggest challenge is to aggregate, process and channel the expectations that have emerged from the struggles of several subordinate social groups. The underground imaginary need smart political articulation to crystallize into a reality which, as the Honduran, demands urgent transformations, beginning with concrete actions in the short term without losing sight of the long-term horizon.

To concrete the new correlation of forces it is necessary to create conditions for a National Constitutional process that shuold result in a new Constitution, thus reflecting the new balance of power. A new Constitution is required to redesign the bases and guidelines of the Honduran State. For this task, it is important to deepen knowledge and interaction with the Latin American neo-constitucionalism trends (Ávila, 2011).

Indeed, the Latin American neo-constitucionalism make a substantive difference to recognize new rights, adopt the multiculturalism notion, redefine the rights of sovereignty, deepening democracy, and, in its most evolved versions, it is able to recognize *rights of nature* (*Pachamama*).

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